

66 House districts must be remapped

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Sixty-six out of 105 Louisiana House of Representatives' election districts fail to comply with legal standards because of population shifts in the past decade.

The statistic is based on population data the House released Wednesday

using newly released 2010 census numbers.

The information forms the starting point for the redrawing of House districts to ensure each district has roughly the same number of people to meet federal and state election laws.

The numbers likely will translate into more seats for the Capital Area, where districts far exceed the ideal population. Fewer seats are likely to be needed in Orleans and St. Bernard parishes, where election districts fall short of required population levels.

The Legislature meets in special session March 20 to April 13 to tackle the once-every-decade realignment of legislative, congressional and other election districts to reflect population shifts.

The population ideal in the House remap process is 43,174. No district can be more than 5 percent over or under that population number. That means the districts can have between 41,015 and 45,334 residents.

The U.S. Census count showed that 66 House districts are not within the allowed 5 percent deviation. The districts are

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spread around the state. But the biggest swings are south of Interstate 10.

House District 99, which includes many of the Lower 9th Ward neighborhoods in New Orleans that were flooded after Hurricane Katrina in 2005, is the most under at nearly 62 percent below the population ideal. That will trigger losses of House representation from the area as districts must expand geographically to capture needed population.

The district is currently represented by Democratic state Rep. Charmaine Stiaes.

"In my block alone in the Lower 9th Ward, there are only two houses that have come back," Stiaes said. Her district likely "will fade into one of the adjacent districts."

Stiaes said she would fight for the district to remain in Orleans Parish, rather than being added to a district where most of the voters live in St. Bernard Parish.

On the other end of the spectrum, House District 59, represented by state Rep. Eddie Lambert, R-Prairieville, is nearly 52 percent over the population ideal. The district covers the northwestern part of Ascension Parish and includes parts of Prairieville and Gonzales.

The district now has 22,369 too many people living there.

"Basically what I'm going to have to end up doing is cutting loose that many people," said Lambert, who lives on the north end of the Ascension district. "I would assume the Gonzales area would drop off."

Districts with the largest population gains are in Ascension, Livingston, St. Tammany and Tangipahoa parishes. They will have to shed population and shrink geographically.

House District 70, represented by state Rep. Franklin Foil, R-Baton Rouge, is also among the top 10 population gainers — nearly 25 percent over the ideal. He's in a southeastern East Baton Rouge Parish district,

Targeted districts

The U.S. Census Bureau every 10 years counts the nation's population in order to ensure elected officials represent roughly the same number of people. Legally, each member of the Louisiana House of Representatives should have about 43,174 constituents. The House on Wednesday released a report that applied the recently completed Census Bureau counts to the districts from which the 105 state representatives are elected. This chart shows the percentage of population above or below the 43,174 ideal. These are the districts likely to be most affected when the lines are redrawn to include the ideal population.

BIGGEST POPULATION GAINS

DISTRICT	MAIN PARISH	REPRESENTATIVE	% ABOVE IDEAL
59	Ascension	Eddie Lambert	+51.8
77	St. Tammany	John Schroder	+44.34
88	Ascension	Mert Smiley	+44.32
74	St. Tammany	Scott Simon	+29.06
71	Livingston	J. Rogers Pope	+26.8
43	Lafayette	Paige Cortez	+26.67
73	Tangipahoa	Steve Pugh	+26.14
70	East Baton Rouge	Franklin Foil	+24.6
8	Bossier	Jane Smith	+24.17
52	Terrebonne	Gordon Dove	+23.28

BIGGEST POPULATION LOSSES

DISTRICT	MAIN PARISH	REPRESENTATIVE	% BELOW IDEAL
99	Orleans	Charmaine Stiaes	-61.96
104	St. Bernard	Nita Hutter	-50.6
103	St. Bernard	Reed Henderson	-45.23
96	Orleans	Juan LaFonta	-42.79
101	Orleans	Wesley Bishop	-42.04
97	Orleans	Jared Brossett	-40.1
91	Orleans	Walt Leger	-30.18
100	Orleans	Austin Badon	-29.99
98	Orleans	Neil Abramson	-29.7
93	Orleans	Helena Moreno	-29.24

Source: Louisiana House of Representatives

Advocate graphic

whose southern border is the Bayou Manchac. The district has 10,622 too many residents.

One north Louisiana district — House 8, represented by state Rep. Jane Smith, R-Bossier City — ranked in the top 10 exceeding the ideal population. It was over by 24 percent or 10,437 residents.

The release of the numbers comes as the House prepares to conduct hearings across the state to get public input on what's important to residents as the district lines are redrawn.

"At this point, we have actual numbers we can take out to the

nine regional meetings and give the public the opportunity to see what the real snapshot is of their area," said House redistricting leader state Rep. Rick Gallot, D-Ruston.

Gallot said it may be important to people that new districts keep their neighborhoods whole or they may not like the idea of a district crossing parish lines.

"What we want to know is what is important to people at this point based on the numbers we have," Gallot said. "The public input is absolutely necessary. We have got to have it."

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